



## Reclaiming Allapattah!

In north-central Martin County, today’s “typical” landscape is likely to be an orange grove or a ranch with pastures filled with grazing beef or dairy cows. But by the beginning of 2003, approximately 20,000 acres of land known as the Allapattah Ranch – used for decades to pasture beef cattle – will be set on the road to restoration through a unique partnership between local, state and federal governments. The restoration’s goal is to restore and enhance wetlands for wildlife, improve water quality and decrease storm water flows into the St. Lucie River and

### CREDITS

*WaterMatters* is produced by the South Florida Water Management District’s Department of Public Information to inform the public about District projects and programs. An internet version is also available in English and Spanish at [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov)

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*The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state’s five water management districts.*

*Our mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems, and water supply.*

Year 1, Issue 2

the Indian River Lagoon. This will provide enhanced habitat for many threatened and endangered animals – and accelerate some of the expected benefits of a larger state-federal plan to restore the Everglades.

Less than 100 years ago, this land was very different. The area’s natural pine forests, wet prairies and interconnected shallow rivers and streams were probably a very comfortable home for alligators and other native wildlife and productive hunting and fishing grounds for Native Americans and the state’s first explorers. (The word Allapattah is very close to words in the Creek, Seminole and Miccosukee tribes’ languages for alligator.)

In 1912, the Allapattah Ranch was part of Palm Beach County. Land sold at a price of \$50 per acre in advertisements distributed throughout the nation and in Canada and Europe.

Our ancestors saw very little value in swamps or “unimproved” land. The mindset was: To get the best value from the land, it needed to be drained because wetlands had little or no value. We know now that these natural systems play a vital part in storing and cleaning our water resources, which is why we are working to acquire and restore natural systems.

The purchase and restoration will be financed through a unique partnership that includes the South Florida Water Management District, Martin County, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The total acquisition cost was approximately \$50 million, with the District contributing about \$40 million, and Martin County

contributing \$10 million.

A contribution of approximately \$30 million from USDA’s Wetlands Reserve Program helped to accelerate the acquisition and restoration of the Allapattah property. The authorization and funding for the Wetlands Reserve Program are included within the 2002 Farm Bill. Members of Florida’s Congressional delegation helped to ensure that the Farm Bill included adequate funding for conservation programs such as the Wetlands Reserve Program, and that the authorization would apply to agricultural and environmental conditions in Florida.

“This land acquisition represents just how successful partnerships between local, state and federal governments can be,” Governing Board member Lennart Lindahl said.

Work has already begun to treat exotic pest plants such as Brazilian pepper and melaleuca. Sections of the property will continue to be leased for restricted cattle grazing even while restoration activities are under way – primarily to prevent additional infestations of exotic plants from overrunning the large acreage.

Approximately 2,300 acres of the western part of Allapattah is proposed for use as a stormwater treatment area. For the remainder of the property, filling drainage ditches and modifying current drainage practices will encourage the native plants, trees and wildlife – which once thrived in the pine flatwoods, marshes and prairies of this landscape – to reclaim it.



*Martin County Commission Chair **Elmira Gainey**, left, presents an Allapattah partnership funding check to SFWMD Board members **Lennart Lindahl** and **Trudi Williams**, and Executive Director **Henry Dean**.*

## Water Matters in Broward County (and everywhere else, too!)

In October, we premiered our *WaterMatters* newsletter. That same month, the Broward County Board of Commissioners launched “**Water Matters**,” a public education campaign with the same title designed to help county residents understand where they fit in the water management system, and why their participation is so important. “**Water Matters** helps homeowners understand what they can do to manage water resources more wisely,” Broward County Commissioner Kristin Jacobs said.

Campaign information will be broadcast on radio, television and in newspapers – and on the web at [www.broward.org/watermatters](http://www.broward.org/watermatters). For a brochure about what consumers can do, call (954) 519-1270. The campaign will also include work on water projects with community groups like the Girl and Boy Scouts, programs for property managers, and other community education events.

“Water resource management is more than just conservation and planning for the future by local governments,” David Lee, director of Broward County’s Water Resources Division in the Department of Planning and Environmental Protection said. “It is about ensuring we do what we can as citizens to protect water quality, including how we manage our lawn care, how we prepare for storms and how we reduce the negative impact of chemical lawn products.”

As local governments manage today and plan for tomorrow, residents play a critical role, and **Water Matters** will help them understand that role.



### Who is Freddy?

His full name is “Freddy the Friendly Alligator.” He is the South Florida Water Management District’s mascot.

You may have seen him on the signs that mark the region’s canals and rivers.

Alligators are nature’s water managers, and are what most people picture when they think about Florida. Alligators dig deep holes in the swamp where they “hang out.” When drought strikes, these “gator holes” provide water and food (fish, turtles, insects) for many other species such as wading birds. At the same time, any creature sharing the alligator’s territory could become its lunch! That’s why people should remember that alligators are wild animals which should be admired, but also avoided.



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